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**The Iowa Blind History Archive
History of Blindness in Iowa - Oral History Project
Interview with [Name]
Conducted by [Name]
[Date]
Transcribed by [Name]**

NOTE: Any text included in brackets [] is information that was added by the narrator after reviewing the original transcript. Therefore, this information is not included in the audio version of the interview.

**Joe Van Lent, Des Moines, IA
Mike Hicklin
Des Moines, IA
11-11-2010**

Mike Hicklin: Good morning. My name is Mike Hicklin. I'm interviewing Joe Van Lent this morning. The date is November 11, 2010. All stories submitted to this project will become part of a history of blindness collection owned by

the state, by the Iowa Department for the blind. By submitting your story you are acknowledging that your story is a gift which transfers to the Iowa Department for the Blind all legal title and property rights. You will be granting to the Iowa Department for the Blind an unrestricted license to use this recording and all the information it contains in any manner that the Department for the Blind may wish to use it for as long as Iowa Department for the blind wishes to use it. Joe, do you agree to have your story recorded this morning?

Joe Van Lent: Yes, fine.

Hicklin: Okay, tell us your name, age and where you live.

Van Lent: Alright, my name is Joseph Van Lent. That's capital Van capital Lent, two words, and I live at 300 Walnut in the Plaza condominiums. I own a unit, a 2 bedroom unit on the 15th floor and I've lived here since 1987, 20, going on 24 years. I like the Plaza condominiums, because it's hooked onto the sky walk. I can walk over to the Civic Center and see a show if I want or down to Walgreens and get my prescriptions, to my bank to get my banking business and also my lawyer has an office at 801 Grand in the Principal 43-story building and so I can walk over there, too. There's restaurants there and Court Avenue has restaurants, farmer's market on Saturdays, so it's a convenient place and I really like it here.

Hicklin: What stories would you like to tell us this morning?

Van Lent: Well, first I guess I'll give you a little history. I was... I lived up on a farm in Northern Iowa in a little town about 200 people called Dougherty, Iowa. Its about 25 miles South East of Mason City and the farm I lived on my father bought in the depression, was about a mile North of town and a half mile East and I was going to St. Patrick's High School. And, as soon as I got out of high school I helped my father with farming, and then the next year I started farming on my own and I was farming around 500 acres for about 10 to 12 years when I lost my sight, or I started to lose my sight from sugar Diabetes.

I became a diabetic at 15-years of age and, of course, back in those days they didn't tell you much about Diabetes. We didn't have the sugar testing machines that we have today, and so it was much harder to keep track of where your sugar was and also they didn't have the special insulins like they have today. Back then they gave everybody 40 units of U 40 or U 100 mph and that's what you took and you had your highs and lows and it was much harder to control Diabetes. Also, being young, I wasn't as careful with my Diabetes as I am, as I got older and realized that taking care of my Diabetes was as important to my health and well being as anything else that I could do.

So, when I lost my sight, or started to lose it, I went to the eye doctor and he mentioned that he had visited and taken a tour of the Iowa Department for the Blind and at that time it was called the Iowa Commission for the Blind in Des Moines, Iowa and that he had met Dr. Jernigan, the Director of the Iowa Commission for the Blind and that it was a good place to learn how to handle being blind and that they could get me a job and that blindness wasn't all that I was so afraid of that... and, of course, I was afraid when I first

started losing it, thinking that I could not farm any longer. I had arranged a sale to sell my machinery and my cattle and hogs and I didn't know about a farmer named Elwyn Hemphkin, who lived over by Blairsburg, I believe and was farming even though he was blind. And, by the time Diann Weinmann, who was my counselor from the Iowa Commission for the Blind, she came up to see me, but she got stuck in a dirt road. She turned off on the wrong road and missed... had missed the farm where I lived by a mile and so she... by the time she got a farmer to dig her out she had to go back home. So, I didn't see her for another three weeks and by that time I'd placed the farm sale in the paper and was too far along and she couldn't convince me that I could continue to farm.

As a result, I... that Fall I came to the Iowa Dep... Commission for the Blind and started taking training. There were about 26 students there at the time, so I had another thing that the Commission for the Blind had done. Dr. Jernigan had the philosophy that the average person could do the average job even though you are blind, and I saw different examples of people who were working and learned about the different jobs that some of them held and that gave me some more... a better feeling of confidence that maybe I could get a job too. Then, during that time I had older people there and some people my age and some people younger than I was. I was about 31 when I lost my sight and... a good portion of it and, of course, over the years I lost the rest of it and I'm totally blind now. I have been for a good ten or fifteen years.

I finally decided to go into what's called, the Business Enterprise Program, at the Iowa Commission for the Blind. And I didn't really get any training as such, other than on-

the-job training. And, I took over a little location in the old Banker's Trust building. It was between two revolving doors and on one side to get in and out of the stand, you had to fight with that revolving door, and every time you opened your door to go out you had to be careful (Laughter), because somebody might be coming in the revolving door and they could take your arm off (Laughter). Anyway, that... I was successful at that and turned that business that was not doing well into where I was making five or six times the average that it made. And so, I got the chance then when the Iowa Commission for the Blind took over the Polk County Court House cafeteria, when Dr. Jernigan had got a law passed in the Iowa legislature that made Iowa counties and state buildings, and so forth, the property of... or wouldn't say the property of, but the... that the Iowa Blind program had the first chance to run food establishments, or vending establishments in any county or state office building. And, when the Polk County Court House cafeteria there came up, it was a private cafeteria there, but the lady quit, so she was running it under the grandfather clause that left her the ability to stay there. After she left, then I was assigned to that location and I ran that for several years and we had very good business there... big coffee lines and breakfasts and dinner and after about seven years, the Iowa legislature changed the rules and said that all Iowa courts had to be all together in court houses and they decided that there wasn't room for the cafeteria and they switched to vending machines.

And I, at that time, then, had to learn about vending machines and how to run them, how to repair them, and how to clean them and the same thing with the cafeteria. I had never run a cafeteria before in my life, but my wife, Nancy,

and I took it over and... She was legally blind too and she did some... a lot of the cooking and I did the running of the register and ordering and so forth and I learned some of that from help from a lady that the Commission for the Blind provided. They help people in the Iowa Business Enterprise Program. I know her name, but I can't think of it at the moment. Anyway, after that I was there at the Iowa... or at the Polk County Court House for a total of 19 years and then in 1991, I transferred to the Hoover State Office Building and I ran that, which had vending machines on seven floors. And, I ran that location till I retired last year, October one of 19... or of 2009.

During that time, I got to... We had a change of Directors and eventually the Director was Creig Slayton and I got along pretty good with Creig. And, about that time Roger Erpelding became Director of the Business Enterprise Program, and Roger and I worked together very well and later about 19... I think it was 89 I was elected to the board, Blind Vendors Committee. And, two years later I became chairman of the Blind Vendors Committee, which dealt with the blind vending program and any problems or training of newly blinded people who came into the program or may even have been blinded for several years and had taken training at the Iowa Depart... Commission for the Blind to... as I had done...to see if they could learn how to get around and travel and get a job, or take training for college. And, as a result I began to get trainees who wanted to come into the vending program. And, I probably trained over 30 different people who are either now in the vending program or have retired from the vending... or the Business Enterprise Program.

I managed to be able to do that even though in Iowa we had two groups of blind consumers, one called the National Federation of the Blind that I belong to and one called The American Council of the Blind, an affiliate, I'm not sure of the correct name and, but, I did not venture into trying to convince these trainees they should belong to one group or the other. They were there to learn a job and to do that job well. And, that's what I tried to teach them.

15:00

Van Lent: As a result, I was head of the blind vending program... committee, rather, for about 18 years when I chose to retire to let... when I knew I would be retiring soon and I let... wanted someone else to come in as chairman to get the feel of being the chairman and what they should... or could do and what they couldn't do. We had some problems once in a while in the vending program where somebody either might not be doing their job or there was a dispute about who should be given a location or who shouldn't and we always seemed to be able to settle them or get them worked out and they never ended up, like in some states, ending up in court or anything else. But, the real part about the Iowa Department for the Blind, as it's called now, is that it gives you a chance to learn that blindness is not the worst thing that can happen to you in life. I, at one time thought that, but I learned that it wasn't so.

And, I am now married to my second wife. My first wife, Nancy had sugar Diabetes and died from kidney failure and then I met my present wife, Laura Van Lent, who was Laura Erwin at the time and we've been married, now, for 28 years and Laura is a sighted gal. So I've learned how it is to live

as... with a blind partner or with a sighted partner, and that it depends on your individual ability to get along and pick the right partner, I guess.

Anyway, the other thing I think that is important, and maybe to some people, like I, have sugar Diabetes, is that one of the things...and I've had Diabetes, now, for 57 years and the only problem that I've had from the Diabetes is that I lost my sight. My kidneys are still good and I have all my limbs and no extremities or anything have had to be taken off. I had some stents put in my chest, and I learned to change my diet to be sure that my cholesterol stays low as well and that is a good part of taking care of your Diabetes is learning that you have to learn to eat right. That doesn't mean that you can't enjoy most things, but that you have to have a limit on them and also, in my case, because of my cholesterol going up, learn to eat low fat foods more like chicken and fish and I limit... if I have bread I don't eat potatoes, but particularly vegetables I love green beans, so that doesn't bother me much (Laughter)...

Hicklin: Do you eat much in the way of fruits, Joe?

Van Lent: Yes, fruits are also... but fruits are high in sugars, so you have to take into account when you have like peaches or apples or so forth that, there again, there's a limit. You can't just eat three apples in one sitting or a day. It's... You have to limit according to how much insulin you have to take. Some people don't even have to take insulin; they just... they're Type 2 Diabetic and they may get along on a pill and, but they still have to watch their diet, too, and the other thing is to test your blood sugar. They have manufacturers of the sugar testers have come along now

with a talking blood sugar tester that will tell you your blood sugar; speak to you and tell you what it is and tell you that the strip is ready for putting blood on it and so forth. And, that is the biggest help. I test my blood sugar anywhere from eight to ten times a day, because I'm what's called a brittle Diabetic.

When you get juvenile Diabetes at 15 or so, you tend to be more brittle than people who get Diabetes older in life and so you have to watch your blood sugars at one time. You can be 80 before breakfast and you have breakfast and then you might go up to 200, but you... I take a type of Insulin called Landis, which I take 12 units each night and then once a day, once a night, or day and then before the meal I'll take 2 units of Homolog, too, before lunch and two before breakfast and two before evening and that's pretty much all the insulin I need. Where, in the old days I was taking 40 units. Now, of course, the other thing is you still have to watch for low blood sugars where, because, I... too much blood sugar in your body is not good, but if your blood sugar gets too low, then you have what they call, insulin reaction, and you can pass out and even die from that, so you have to... I always carry some candy or a can of orange juice or something with me just in case. And, if I go anywhere very far I take along my blood sugar in a little kit, my blood sugar tester with me and then I can test my blood and make sure that I'm not getting too low.

Hicklin: How are you able to measure the units of Insulin, Joe? Do you have a system for that?

Van Lent: Well, the National Federation of the Blind has a...handles a lot of these products for the blind, and also as

does the Iowa Department for the Blind and you can buy...there's a kind of wooden outfit where you can put...your lay your insulin bottles in it, and then you put your syringe into the insulin and it has a...you pull your syringe out, and it has a little thing that falls in place and you move that in click by click till you get down to, like you want say if you want two units, or if you need ten units like I do twelve. But, I have made my own from just taking plastic spoons and forks, and I cut off the handle and cut the handle in such a position that I know exactly where two units are. On one other end of the handle I have one for three units and then one for twelve units of insulin. So, that enables me to take my own Insulin and I don't have to depend on my wife for knowing exactly how much insulin I have in the syringe. You have to put the syringe in and out three or four times to get, make sure your...there are no air bubbles in the syringe, because you don't want to give yourself air if you would happen to hit a blood vessel, or that you could put air in, and then that could go to your heart and kill you, so you have to make sure you're rid of the air in the syringe.

I have...when I was working at the Business Enterprise Program in my locations; I worked at the Polk County Court House there. I got involved with the bus...the National Federation of the Blind in trying to straighten some problems out, and then as we had a different Director and then the Governor, and the Speaker of the House, Mr. Amenson, decided that they would put the Iowa Commission for the Blind under a new Department. They were trying to cut state government size down and they combined a lot of these smaller Departments, and they wanted to put the Iowa Commission for the Blind in the Department of Human Rights, which would contain several other small

Departments, like the elderly...Department of the Elderly and, oh, different departments for children and women and so forth. And, there were about ten different departments in that Department and we fought that bitterly for a long time and had...I worked as a legislative chairman with some people and people over in the legislature, who I knew from when I used to farm, and had met some of these people and I worked with them and we lost that battle in a close vote. We were alright in the senate, but we couldn't get the house to come along with us, so we were put under the Department of Human Rights, and later we still were working with the legislature to get us back out, because we did not seem to do as well under the Department of Human Rights.

And, that's because blind people have a unique problem that most of the other groups don't have, and that's...first of all you've got to convince blind people that they can do things and you've got to also convince the public that the blind can do things; hold jobs and the blind themselves that they can walk by themselves or that they can maybe add and subtract on a calculator, a talking calculator, or run a cell phone. And, a lot of blind people, also, are very good with computers, so, we...I got involved with Senator McKinley and Senator Jack Rife, from Osco, Iowa and we were able to get a bill behind the scene going.

And, Senator McKinley introduced it one day in the Senate and it passed the Senate to get the Commission for the Blind back out as a separate agency. However, we got over to the House and we lost that battle again and so we just continued on and I worked with Senator John Hammond from Ames, and eventually the legislature decided that we were right and that the Iowa...now called the Iowa

Department for the Blind should come out as a separate agency. It wasn't called Iowa Department for the Blind, under the Department of Human Rights. It was called the Iowa Division for the Blind, because all ten of those Divisions were called Divisions not Departments any longer, but once we got the Iowa Division for the Blind out from the Iowa Department for the Human Rights, why, it was given the name, Iowa Department for the Blind. And, all the while we kept the building for the blind up at Fourth and Keo, luckily, and we did continue to have students with their own rooms, and that up there, while they were learning about how to travel, and learning Braille, and down in the workshop, that's one of the things that I probably jumped over a little fast, is that when I came to the Department for the Blind I...

First few days I had to learn how to travel in the building, go up and down steps with sleep shades that we wore, so that if you have any sight at all you couldn't use your sight. You were...and that was to teach you that even if you lose your sight further on in life...you could...all of your sight, you could still do the things that...and hold a job just like any sighted person.

30:00

And so, I found my way around the building, got lost a few times, and then they put us out on the street and made us walk around the building, and I remember thinking, there's nothing to this; this is easy, and I was going right along, not being...caning exactly like I'd been taught to cane and boom! I ran right into a big electric pole, and banged up my teeth and loosened a few teeth, (Laughter), and so forth.

And the travel teacher was behind me and she said, “Well, now, maybe you’ll learn to cane like we taught you” (Laughter). And, that’s all the more sympathy she had for me, and that, in the end, taught me, you know, that I did have to pay attention to what I was doing. It wasn’t quite as easy as I thought, but from there we went to learning how to cross streets and go when the traffic light changed, by listening for the sound of the traffic as it started and stopped. And, then we spread out to where we were doing maybe ten twelve blocks at a time and then we were sent to different locations to get something and bring it back for the home economics class or some such thing. And, gradually the routes kept lengthening and then they would take us out in the car and drop us off, without telling us where they had dropped us off, and we would have to figure out how to find our way back to the Iowa Dep...Commission or Department for the Blind, Commission for the Blind.

So, that was a challenge, but we learned we could do it and we would graduate from that training of learning cane travel, as we called it, by doing what was called the five point two. In other words, the route we were given to go around the city consisted of five and two tenths mile. And, we had to take that route and make it all the way around that route and back to the Iowa Department for the Blind. And, there was no time limit on it, but as you got a group of 26 people and some of you are taking that travel and some of them already have done that, so you were with people who were in various degrees of training. Some had already done the cane travel and were graduated from that and others were just starting to learn it, and some of us were in the middle and so forth. So, that was the best things we ever learned, I think is that you can travel with a cane and

get around, and you have to be...we would get also where they would take us out to a really busy street, might even be like East 14th or some place and you would have to cross that street, where there was no side, no street crossing or street lights and so you really had to learn on how fast cars were coming and how many and so forth and get across the street and we did that, oh, two, three, four times just to prove to ourselves that it could be done.

Now, that doesn't mean I never got lost, because I can remember getting up into the big parking lots that were up by Veterans Auditorium and getting lost out in the middle of that and having to find my way back out, and by listening to traffic, and so forth, eventually get it, but it could be a little scary at first. I kind of like the fact that we had as many as 26 students, because we had more students in different degrees of training. And so, you could always talk to somebody who had already been through what you maybe had gone through that day, or in talking to them we would go out together at night for supper and down to, oh there was a steak house down there that a lot of us used to go to on Grand, 7th and Grand. So, we would get together at night and talk and have supper and so forth and get, sometimes sympathy from somebody who had been through something when maybe you had had a bad day in your cane travel and didn't do well and so it...the mixture of different people and people with different...had developed their training and were maybe through areas which you hadn't learned, or were starting when you could tell them what you had already learned...was very helpful.

The other big area that I liked a lot because, of course, when I was a farmer, I did a lot of repair work and so forth, on my own machinery, and so on, and buildings...and we had

workshop, I recall, down there where you learned, first of all, how to hammer a nail and then how to cut a square board. And, then we were given training with an electric saw, which is really scary, you know. I've known sighted people who had cut off their fingers with an electric saw, and so we had to learn how to set the board in there and make sure where our fingers were all the time, so we weren't in danger. And, then we learned how to use a router, and two or three other different machines, including power drills and saw. And, then we made a piece of furniture, or whatever we wanted to make out of wood. And, I made a bedroom, what you call, the head board for a bed and I made one for myself and one for the Commission for the Blind that I left there, and then they would use to put that up at the Commission. And, when the legislators or people come, touring the building, they could use the finished products that the blind people had made. We had to stain them, of course, and wax them and get them all ready so that it was a finished product that you could be proud enough to have in your home.

And, I ran into a little problem with one of them, because we got some wood that was not dry as it should be. And, I made the whole project and then I went home, and to National Convention of the National Federation of the Blind, and when I came back, that head board was sitting in the basement. And, it had broken apart, because the boards were green and they had...they dried out, they curled away and broke apart from each other, so I had to make that whole head board over again and make sure the lumber was good dry and was not still quite...that it was cured. And so, that made some extra work for me. I also...I was used to batching at home.

My father lived with me some but I did not have a mother; she died when I was 4-years-old. And so, I had three brothers and four sisters. And my sister was 16 when Mom died. Oldest sister she kind of took care of us, until later when I think the youngest, my youngest brother was...my youngest brother was 16 when she left home and so I was batching at home, and so Home Economics was not something I didn't know. I baked cakes at home and made salads and so forth, but it's a lot different when I was doing it as a blind person with sleep shades on. And so, I had to learn a lot of that and when Ruth Schroeder was the Home Ec. teacher then, and we used to have...sometimes I think the class in Home Ec. was more for the philosophy about blindness, and the fact of what you could and couldn't do as a blind person than it was about learning how to do things. But we did learn, there, how to do laundry and how to fry an egg, bake a casserole or make up a casserole and even baked bread a time or two. So, but I enjoyed that class. And, I was there for about six weeks. That's about all the longer we...most of us stayed in Home Ec. class, but we did...I really enjoyed it. I almost hated to leave that class. And in the meantime, we also had Braille class with...

Hicklin: Mabel?

Van Lent: What did you say her name was?

Hicklin: Mabel?

Van Lent: Mabel. Yes Mabel. Mabel was a blind lady who could read Braille like no one I ever believed could read Braille. And, when you used to be reading Braille, when

you'd stumble on a word you couldn't figure out what the word was or that...Mabel would reach across the table and read the Braille upside-down (Laughter) and tell you what the word was, so that's how good she was at teaching Braille. But, I learned there to, how to use a slate and stylus, which is like using a pencil and a note pad, and that way you could write down notes to yourself or notes about different things you might have to get at the store. You learn, then, later, how to use a tape where you could Braille the tape, and then you could take the back of the Braille tape apart, and then put that tape on a can. Or like when I had records, I would put the Braille on what the record was and when you wanted to play...in those days we had 45 records or the big 33 and a third...they were big records that played several songs, and that was before the 8-track tapes, and later cassettes came along, because you remember I'm talking back 40-50 years ago.

Hicklin: They were known as the good old days.

Van Lent: Yeah, that's true. And, we also had typing, then, which Beulah taught, and we had to learn. And, all this was done with your sleep shades on, and so. But, I had had some typing in high school so I...what you learn to do, of course, by in high school they put little caps over your letters, so you didn't know what the letter was that way either. So, that wasn't much different than doing it as a blind person. And, it also made you think about the fact that yeah, maybe you don't need sight. If sighted people would think about that, sometimes, that was the way they were taught to become a good typist, was we had caps over the letters and you had to learn how to just get your fingers

positioned so you would hit the right letters all the time, and also, then, how to correct the mistakes, when you made one, with the whiting that you could put to black out the wrong letter and retype in the right one. Not that I ever was a great typist, but at least I could do it. And, of course, we learned to write letters and so forth, which is important as a blind person. You want to correspond with someone, particularly someone like in the legislature and so forth, you don't want to send them a letter that's full of mistakes, and the lines aren't right and so forth. So typing is important there too.

Now you use computers, of course, and they talk, so that helps out a lot and, of course, I got good enough at Braille, that I also use the Brailier, and learned to go through the whole alphabet, and to write Braille with the Brailier as well, which is like a typewriter, except it only has six keys, and by punching various keys, you come up with the different dots, where the dots...there's six dots in the Braille cell, and like one, two, three on one side and four, five, six in the other and like one and three would be "C", and one and two would be "B", and just one would be "A", and the first ten letters would also be the numbers, like "A" would be the same as one, and "B" would be two, and so forth, "C" three, "D" 4 and right on down till you got to zero.

45:00

But, as I've got older and older that is one thing where my Diabetes has...my fingers have gotten where there's not very good feeling in the extremities of my fingers, and I can't read Braille now...I can read it, but if it's very much Braille and my fingers get sore right away. And so, I'm pretty

limited, but I can still write notes to myself and, like, when I was Chairman of the Blind Vender's Committee, I would have the agenda written out in Braille, and then I could read that to keep track of what was...we needed to bring up next in the meeting and so forth. So, I guess that's pretty much the history of my becoming blind, and learning that that did not mean the end of my life that I did have a future.

And, I believe I've had a very good, successful life with a really decent income, decent enough that I was able to buy a condominium in the Plaza Condominiums. And, the condominium that I live in is over, now would sell for over \$200,000. So, you know, I made some good income during those years. And, I had...I spent, I believe it was close to 38 years in the Business Enterprise Vending Program, running my own business and training others at no cost to the Iowa Commission or Iowa Department for the Blind, because they had helped me to learn that blindness didn't mean the end of my life. And, they had given me the chance to learn that I could hold a job. They've given me the chance to get a job and had helped me all through the years with providing machines and replacing them. And, I had to, of course, keep them in shape, in good shape, so that when I left the program, my machines were in good shape for somebody else to take over and learn. But I think you owe everyone in this world some things, especially when they have given you so much.

And, I think the...I have to say that for the Iowa Department for the Blind, and I guess that's why I'm a member of the National Federation of the Blind, because I know that if it wasn't for Dr. Jernigan coming here to Iowa in 1959, and getting...when the Commission was housed in a three-room school house, sharing it with the Commerce

Commission and where he got to know the later Governor Harold Hughes and become good friends with him. And, then Dr. Jernigan moved into the Iowa Commission for the Blind building that, at that time, had been a Y.M.C.A. building and it had been abandoned. And, the state bought it and taken it over and Dr. Jernigan just moved in, and took it over and got the legislature and the Governor to agree that the Iowa blind could have this building, because they needed a bigger building to develop the training program that Dr. Jernigan had in mind and also a place where the students could be housed, while they were learning. And, of course, all that happened and as a result, Iowa became known as...if you...there was a saying that, "if you're going to be blind, the best place to be blind is in Iowa," because of his training programs and the ability to make blind people believe in themselves.

I hope that anyone who reads this program, if they are losing their sight, will understand from this that you do have a future, and its up to you as to how good that future is, and that's why you want to take all the training you can get and learn Braille, in particular, if you can, because we have a saying in the National Federation of the Blind that, "Braille readers are leaders." And, that's because the ability to read and write Braille is a tremendous help, whether you go to college, whatever job you hold or just plain living at home. If you're an older person, and don't even plan on looking for a job. You're just there to learn that you can take care of your house, yourself, and that you can cook and live at home instead of having to go to a nursing home, that if you learn Braille, it is a big help to you to mark your cans of food and also records and keep records and so forth. So, I would stress strongly that you learn Cane Travel, and you learn

Braille, in particular, that's two of the most strongly needed things in your life that will help you to be successful. Thank you.

52:01

(End of Recording 1)

(Beginning of Recording 2)

Hicklin: Okay Joe, could you...I have a couple questions. Could you talk to us a little bit about how the, or what brought about the Vending Business Enterprise Program moving away from full fledged cafeterias to more vending operations?

Van Lent: Yes, I was, of course, Chairman of the Blind Vender's Committee when that decision was made. And the reason for that was that as time changes, and every facet of life, it seems like people now tend to eat more of the type of snacks and sandwiches, and are not ready for that big, big meal. A lot of them are watching their weight, and so forth, and so we did not have as many customers as we once had. People are watching their weight more, but also the buildings and the state buildings, of course. In the Court House we lost the cafeteria, because of the judges moving, and they needed the room that the cafeteria took for more room for judges and so forth. In fact, they not only moved us out, they moved all the state, the county offices out of that building as well, and it now strictly houses courts. And, the offices were moved over to the old post office on Second, and Court, which was converted into a office building, and

now houses the Polk County Treasurer, and oh, license plates, where they get license plates and several other different Departments over there at the County. And so, that's why that the courts and the offices and the courts meet...sometimes they might meet and you have people there for dinner or they might get their case settled and everybody goes home at 11 O'clock; and so you prepare dinner and nobody's there for dinner, (Laughter). So, it wasn't good, well, of course, we didn't have the room anyway. But, I mean, it was one of the reasons, also, why we couldn't depend on the courts alone for keeping the cafeteria open.

Then, and the biggest problem is that the equipment for cafeteria location is tremendously expensive. The line, even that alone, even we had just a small cafeteria in the Polk County Court House, but when they remodeled that, after we took it over and they put it in, and this was back in 1972/73...why the cabinet to hang on the wall was \$2,000 and a table, because these were all stainless steel, a table where we put on the slicer, meat slicer and also where we made sandwiches and so forth. That table was over a thousand dollars. We had a big counter going down where we had the toaster, microwave ovens and that sitting on, and that was around four or five thousand dollars. You hung pans and that on the back side. The dish washer was very expensive. We had to have two, at least two sinks; three, if you didn't have a dish washer, and all that had to be stainless steel. That's probably in the ten, twelve thousand dollars back then. And, then we had a whole line and a salad bar and all that out front and then the steam table. And I have no idea even what that line cost, but I know it was tremendously expensive.

When they got farther up the line, we had two big coffee urns and they held something like five, six gallons of coffee a piece and they...and we had tremendous coffee lines, because people...and doughnuts, we sold as much breakfast as...more for breakfast and coffee and doughnuts and so forth, than I sold for dinner. So, we had a tremendous...and then cups there we...and that's one of the things, we bought cups for that cafeteria and they were a very nice, light cup, but they were a beautiful cup and they...people were getting married there...I always said I thought we furnished the homes of the newlyweds, because we lost so many of these cups. They just disappeared all the time. And finally we made a decision that we had to buy a big, heavy cup that wasn't...not because the other cups broke, because they didn't. You could drop them on the floor and they wouldn't...and but people just kept taking them, taking them and taking them home I guess. And, once we got the big, heavier cup that was bulky and you had a handful when you grabbed the cup, we didn't lose cups any more (Laughter). The way we wanted it, so, but over in the state house we had to have...we had a big line for a dish washer and that line alone cost over a hundred-thousand dollars for washing the dishes. And, then you had big...in the state house cafeteria, they had a walk-in freezer and I suspect that had to be at least a hundred-thousand or more. And, by the time you put all this in, there was no way that you could justify the cost compared to what income the operators were making.

And so, as time went along, we...especially as they were getting...vending machines were becoming more popular and several other businesses in the city were dropping their cafeterias as well. They had arrangements

with other companies to...who did nothing but provide food and that...and a lot of those companies dropped out of that business. So, we simply said it wasn't worth the cost to the Commission to spend that kind of money, when it could be better used to...for college or other training of individuals who were coming to the Commission for the Blind. And, we went to just strictly vending. And in that...during that time that I was Chairman of the Blind Vending Committee and the Business Enterprise Program, with my urging and help, the National Federation of the Blind managed to talk the state legislators into okaying...and we did that by having exhibits at the Botanical Center, when it had two big rooms, and we would put all machinery like wood working, and people writing Braille and people cooking and cane travel, doing cane travel, and so forth, and invite the legislators to come...and a meeting and have lunch over there and, or dinner I guess it was. It was in the evening. And, we did that for three or four years.

And during that, one of those years, I managed to get the Commission for the Blind to let me borrow a coffee machine and a candy machine and then I got the pop company to give us a pop machine, and we put them up all along together in one area that kind of looked like a vending location that we would have on the highway. And, we explained to the legislators what we were wanting to do, and that these rest areas in some states were now being given to the blind to run. And, that we would like to do the same thing in Iowa. And, that it would be...provide at least 13, 14 new jobs for blind people, and that they then, would be hiring sighted people as drivers and so forth, so that would mean an additional 13 or 14 jobs for sighted people, as well. Plus the tax that the state would get back for the

gas they would use and the vehicles they would have to buy. And, all of this type of stuff would also help the economy. And, the legislators decided we were right. And, so we were allowed to put in vending locations, along the highway, wherever there was a rest area. And so, that's how we got the blind in the rest areas across the state. And, the blind now run the...and take care of the machines in these, especially if it's a state building, new rest area buildings.

We are moving into those buildings inside, where originally we had the glass frame with the frame around the glass buildings that the Commission put up itself. And, we had the machines there. Now we're putting them in the new buildings that the state is building and they're inside, where it's nice and warm and air conditioned in the summer, and close to the bathrooms, so that people come out, they can get themselves a cup of coffee and crackers or chips or some such thing or things for the kids to eat. And, hopefully we're working with the Health Department of the state of Iowa to provide good, healthy choices as well there. But, that provides us more jobs than what the cafeterias were doing and so we were better off. Plus, then we put vending machines in where we had the cafeterias. And, I think one of the other reasons we went to that was in 79 the Hoover Building was built...and Sylvester Nemmers...that was built with the idea that there would be no cafeteria in it. The state made that decision, and that it would be all vending, because they saw so many private businesses doing that very thing. They decided that's what they would do with that new office building. And, there was talk that eventually they might build one big central cafeteria, that would cover all of the state office buildings, including the state house, but that

has never developed. While it was talked about, they decided that cost too much money for them to do it, too.

So, that's really the reason that we gave up the cafeterias. And, the Commission for the Blind had a cafeteria too, and I was really sad to see that go, but I knew that the Commission employees were getting less than a hundred and a lot of them were gone out in the state and they could not any longer provide enough income to make that cafeteria self-supporting and we had to subsidize that cafeteria. And, we reached the point where we felt that it was getting to where it had to have new equipment and all that too; and so we decided to change that into vending also. And, then as a result, the cafeteria left the Commission for the Blind or the Department for the Blind, at that time, building also, but I always liked that cafeteria and I was sad to see it go.

Hicklin: I, too, that was...that was a really good eating establishment for lots of years.

15:00

Van Lent: Yeah.

Hicklin: Now, another question, Joe, what role, thinking of your Diabetes, what role has nutrition and activity played in your overall health?

Van Lent: Well, that's the big part of it, I think. One of the things that has helped me all my life, even when I was a diabetic in farming, was that I was very active. I ran a 500-acre farm with no hired help, except in certain occasions

when I used to work some with the neighbors, where we would combine together and then that way one of us would run the combine and the other would haul the grain into the grain bins and so forth. In the same way, we would fill silos and that, but being very active, and of course I...my weight, right now, is only 120 pounds and I'm five foot seven and a half, so I'm still...and I'm 71-years-old, so I'm still in pretty good shape. And, I never was heavy, but I worked. In fact, in the summer when I'd farm, I used to lose weight during the summer, because I'd be so busy and that and maybe working so much that I really should have eaten more and that probably wasn't as good either, since I was batching then. It may have been part of the reason that my diabetes wasn't in as good of control as it was later when I came to the Commission and I had a more set schedule.

But, I learned, at that time, that you had to pay if you didn't pay attention to what you were eating and nutrition. Of course, with your blood vessels and your arteries and so forth, is important and to keeping them healthy and your heart healthy and also the right vitamins; vitamin B and vitamin B12 is particularly important to me as a diabetic and now they're telling us also, that vitamin D is important and I now am taking extra vitamin D, and, of course, I have always taken extra Vitamin B and different combinations of Vitamin B's. So...and the other thing to point out about nutrition and also what you eat, and that is older people...a lot of them get...are losing their sight from...oh...I would forget the word. My wife has a touch of it, causes blindness. Maybe you can think of it.

Hicklin: I'm thinking of it here, too, Joe, but I'm...

Van Lent: I can't come up with it either. Well anyway, I listen to Paul Harvey on...when I used to be running the register over at the Hoover building, during the noon hour, and he was the one who talked about it and that vitamins could prevent this loss of eye sight from this failure of the eyes; and so I began to get that even for my own eyes and for a while the doctors talked about taking my eyes out. It doesn't matter, because I don't see anything with them anyway, but at least I don't have artificial eyes in my eyeballs or in my eye sockets. And, that seemed to have helped the eyes and they settled down. And, my wife has a touch of this. I wish I could think of the name. And, by taking these vitamins it stopped that disease from progressing and she has not had any change in her eyes in at least five or six years since she's been taking these vitamins. So, and now, at first the eye doctors kind of pooh-poohed it, but now I have a blind nephew, and he's not blind, but his eyesight is getting bad. And, of course, the other thing they have for the eyes now is the laser treatments and that helps him, but his eye doctor is telling him too that Vitamins are very important for the eyes and suggesting that he take certain vitamins.

Hicklin: Well, certainly for the rest of the body, too.

Van Lent: Yeah, but it's particularly important for those eyes, so...

Hicklin: Yes.

Van Lent: But in my case, the other thing was learning to not eat fatty foods. I eat mostly chicken and fish. I don't

eat much tuna, because of the problems of mercury with tuna any more, but I eat a lot of salmon. And, I do have, once in a while, I'll have a grilled pork tenderloin or French dip, but mostly, I stick more with chicken than fish, because it does my cholesterol so much better. And, my cholesterol is...they want in a diabetic they like to have your bad cholesterol below 100 and mine is under 65, so, and that's simply because of the way that I avoid fatty foods. I don't eat gravy. I don't think you have to be that severe, but it doesn't bother me. I have found those foods to be just as satisfying to me as any other foods.

Hicklin: It certainly has worked well for you.

Van Lent: Yes it has. And, in the same thing, by testing my blood sugars and that a lot of the diabetic magazines talk like they like to see you at least down to on your AC1 test, which is the test that you take at the doctor's office every three months. And, it tells you what your average blood sugar was for the last three months. And, the diabetic magazines talk like that you should be 7 or under and my last one was 5.6, which is down with the normal adult who doesn't have diabetes.

Hicklin: How much activity do you plan into your day?

Van Lent: Well, now that I'm retired I do a lot of...I have an exercise room, which is another advantage of having the condominium. And, it has all kinds of exercise equipment down there from bicycles to treadmills, weights and, of course if you look under the couch there, I got two ten-pound weights under there as well. And, but I walk probably

two to three hours a day on the treadmill just to keep my legs exercised. And, I'm trying to make sure that I don't get in a position where I have trouble with losing a leg or a toe or part of a foot, which can often happen to diabetics if they don't get enough activity. And, it's important, even if you don't have a treadmill to walk. And, that's why learning how to use a cane and be able to walk is so important, I think, to your health.

Hicklin: One other question, if I could, Joe, what advice would you give to others on how to make a living and succeed in business as a blind guy?

Van Lent: Well, in business as a blind guy, I guess...

Hicklin: Any guy.

Van Lent: Yes, I had of course...I started farming on my own. I went to the bank and I had a good banker, Rockwell-McGauran, and that was his last name. I've forgotten his first name. But I borrowed \$5,000 from him and that was clear back in 1959 when \$5,000 was a good chunk of money and just on my signature. And, I bought used equipment. And, I bought cattle as I could afford them, and hogs and raised them and, of course, the banker called the hogs a mortgage lifter. Some period of time later after I quit farming, some of the farmers told me that they were also mortgage losers. (Laughter) The price dropped out on them. But, I learned one thing, you can only spend as much as you got coming in and you shouldn't spend as much as you got coming in, because you have to start looking for the future and something that some day you'll want to retire and have

an income to live on. And, good Lord knows, these days we're not even sure of that income, because the Federal Government has not learned to do that and has created so much debt that our dollar is almost unsalable to other countries any more. If it wasn't for China buying it, we wouldn't be able to get rid of it.

I learned in business you have to be willing to work and you got to pay attention to your business. You can't depend on...and that's where we have trouble with blind venders sometimes is they get a person helping them who is sighted, who has to, you know, may read certain things for them or drive for them. Especially now, when so many of them are vending routes and they start letting that person decide what they need to do or don't do, or they think that because that person is sighted they're going to watch out to be sure that the vending machines are all full; that the vending machines are clean and that the building or location where they are is clean and so it all falls back to you, yourself. You could have ten employees. If you don't take care of seeing that those ten employees are all doing their job, why, that's going to hurt your business. And, if you let it go too far that way, it can kill your business. I always said in the...when I had the cafeteria that a good cook could make or break the business. And, that's why a lot of restaurants sometimes don't make it today is that sometimes they lose their cook and they get a different one and that cook may not be as good or doesn't pay attention to what do you do with leftovers and what size portions are you giving if you got a cafeteria on the line.

When we were...Dr. Jernigan took us out to Bishops and we had talks by the people running Bishops cafeterias, which were big in those days and they talked about how

they counted each portion and they figured so many portions that they should get out of a certain size roast beef or so forth and the portion was to be, like four ounces of beef and if they...and maybe they get out of this particular size roast beef they should get, maybe say 30 servings and if they got only 26, they knew the guy doing the serving was not giving out the correct portions. And, that's one way of checking on it. And, it was also a way of checking on the cashiers, and so forth, is they had...they knew how many portions they should be getting out of what they had out there on the line and if the cash register didn't show that many portions, they knew that maybe the cashier had rung one up and not...because the guy didn't ask for a receipt, didn't ring it up in the cash register. And so, there's several ways that your own employees can cost you money in your business, partly by not doing their work and maybe giving the business a bad appearance or simply by also stealing on you by maybe taking goods home or eating all the extra candy or, you know, so forth (Laughter). That adds up.

You think one candy bar a day isn't going to hurt you, but it usually ends up two or three, or even taking it home. And so, you have to...I had tests I ran on my employees to decide whether they were honest or not. And, I don't tell people what that is, because there are other venders who are using it in this day because they learned it from me. There are ways to tell whether you have honest employees, and also you have to have employees that are going to show up and do the job; that you can count on being there every day. But, you also have to set examples for your employees that you're going to be there. And, I worked right beside my employees. If I gave them something to do, I was willing and often did the same job. The next day I might do that

same job. They knew that they weren't being punished or unfairly treated. You also have to treat your customers right. After all, they don't have to buy your product. So, if a customer came to me and had a complaint, I automatically refunded their money and gave them a new product, like a candy bar or that, on top of it, simply because I wanted that customer to come back and I think they always did. At least, I seemed to have a good business anyway.

Hicklin: Well, you certainly made a good living at it, so it apparently works. Anything else that you can think of, Joe, that you would like to mention?

Van Lent: No, I think we pretty well covered things.

Hicklin: Well, thank you so much for taking the time to...

Van Lent: I wish I could remember the name, or what that name of that eye disease is.

Hicklin: We can turn this off and ask Laura.

Van Lent: Yes, I think she's in the other room.

32:31

(End of Recording 2)

(Beginning of Recording 3)

Hicklin: Okay, go ahead.

Van Lent: The eye disease that I was talking about, I asked my wife here, is called Macular Degeneration. And, there is a wet type of Macular Degeneration and a dry type. And, the wet type, vitamins don't help, but the dry Macular Degeneration, vitamins do help and they can stop it from growing or causing the loss of the rest of your eyesight. That's why nutrition can be so important. People don't think about it sometimes and they eat a lot of things that maybe, particularly of course, if you're diabetic that...candy or maybe ice-cream, which is fine in its place, but you know, you can't live on that and your body can't live on it not and take care of itself.

Hicklin: That's certainly true. The food that we eat is often times thought of as being the strongest medicine that we ever put in our body and if we eat trash, pretty soon our health is going to be degraded and, I think that's where lots of diseases... of modern diseases that we have today come from; is really poor nutrition and lack of activity. People don't...

Van Lent: That's why people are overweight, so many of them is simply, because not enough activity, you know, and also that a lot of the foods...you go to Burger King and so forth, and some of them places and now, of course, they're being made to put the calories on a particular sandwich and so forth. Even now, they give the kids these toys and so forth with these snacks. And, the kids then want to go to McDonalds or Burger King all the time, and that's not the kind of food you want to eat day in and day out. And, unfortunately, that's what many people do.

**Hicklin: It's certainly making the physicians rich.
(Laughter) Well thank you, again, Joe, very much. I
certainly appreciate your spending the time with...**

**Van Lent: Well, I hope it can be of help to other people;
especially someone who is trying to decide whether or not
to come in to the Department for the Blind for some training.
And, I say that not just for training for a job, but even
training to be better able to stay at home and do the normal
job that you did as a sighted person; cooking, or cleaning
house and washing clothes or dressing, and so forth. All
these things can be taught to you. And, if you don't take
advantage of it, you're wasting your time, I guess. And, you
probably are going to end up having someone else taking
care of you, when often you can continue to take care of
yourself. That's why I notice that the Commission for the
Blind, right now, does not seem to have as many students in
it as I would like it to have, anyway. And, I know there's got
to be blind people out there who could come in and could be
helped by getting this training. And, I hope that, if nothing
else, maybe your letting them read this will help them to
make up their mind that, yes, its something I've got to do
and it's not a thing that is terrible. It can be a blessing for
me to come in and get the training. So, I hope they will take
advantage of it.**

Hicklin: Thank you, again, Joe.

4:37

(End of Recording 3)

(Beginning of Recording 4)

Hicklin: Oh, let's go ahead, Joe.

Van Lent: Alright. We were talking about business and how to be successful in business, and so forth, and this is part of the training after I took over as Chairman of the Blind Vender's Committee was that we had had trouble in past years with a couple of cafeterias that had ended up not being very clean or kept up and caused the Department, or Commission for the Blind some bad publicity. And so, in going over things with the committee, we decided at that time, to have inspection done by some of the members of the Commission staff that worked for B.E.P. Not that we didn't have state inspections, like when I had the cafeteria I used to post my inspection record all the time on the cash registers so that people could see that we were up and passing state inspections, and I don't think I ever had a lower score than 97 out of a hundred on that. And, then when we had the vending, of course, they come around about once a year and I've never had a lower score from them than a perfect score, so. But, we had some trouble with venders and one thing you have to watch when you have vending machines, and so forth, is not only that you keep the machines clean and the glass clean from finger prints and dust, and so forth. You have to watch the candy and chips, and so forth; pop that you have in there for dates that they weren't out of date. And, we were having a little trouble. Sometimes when we would change operators, finding out that the last operator maybe didn't keep his inventory, either he bought too much inventory than he was

selling, or he just didn't pay attention to it and some of it would be out of date.

So, we got this inspection and worked up a sheet as to what needed to be inspected and so forth, and then we would have the Department for the Blind come around. They would give you a couple days notice and they would come around then, and inspect your location and your vending machines and also the product in them as to whether they were still in...under the warranty date or expiration date. And, we would rate the scores accordingly. And this, when people then applied for a different location, maybe one came open that was a bigger location, or was earning more money, they would bid on that location and their scores on how they operated their business: how good their books were, business sense, did they get their reports in on time, and so forth, were all used to determine which operator would get the location. And, that seemed to work out pretty good. Once in a while we got some complaints from operators who thought the inspection was too excessive, and so forth, but when we had any problems, we would bring the venders in and talk to them, the committee would, and our Business Enterprise Program supervisor, Roger, and discuss the things that might be done to help improve the business, or if there was financial problems how to get the financial problems under control, and so forth.

And, I think this was a big help to the Business Enterprise Program in making sure that we got good operators, or if they were having problems, that we solved the problems early and they didn't develop into the kind of problems that had caused the Department some bad publicity in the past. And, plus, you have inventory that's

good and fresh; you sell more product. So, that was one of the big things, I think that we did during that time.

I also mentioned that, in the past, that I did not talk to blind venders about what blind organization they should belong to or not. And, in some respects, I'm not sure whether that was necessarily a good idea or not, because as I belong to the National Federation of the Blind, blind venders on the national scale...I was first elected to their committee board and then was elected for a second vice president for two or three terms before I chose not to run. And, when you, then would go to their meetings...they would meet sometimes by phone, but usually at the National convention of the Federation of the Blind. You got to talk with other operators from all across the country and some of them were some very good operators with ingenious ideas and programs, and find out how the programs differed in each state. And, I think that was important to venders in helping them to run their business, giving them a lot of different ideas and also just knowing about business and how it operated across the whole country. That's how we first got involved in learning about road-side vending and quickly getting it started then in Iowa, is because of going to that national convention and hearing about the law being passed on the national scene to give those rest areas to blind venders. And, some states, they would just assign the blind venders to private businesses and then use the money to help finance the Department's program in those states. But, in Iowa, and two or three other states, we wanted it to go...to be blind venders running the locations, because it's a good show for the public to see blind people out at work doing things. And, it helped improve the image that blind people could hold jobs and be successful. I think that more

blind vendors should have been going to those national conventions and seen what the blind vendors in other states had to deal with. Also, the post offices, the speakers would come and talk about the contracts with the post office and so forth and you just learned a lot from that.

I was given an award from the National Federation of the Blind Vending Association for my work with that organization as well. Of course, I also I worked in the National Federation of the Blind of Iowa and I was a board member there and then second vice president of the National Federation of the Blind of Iowa as well. I received, and my wife included in this, because she helped me so many times with things we did like nut sales and Bingo, and so forth, that we ran for the National Federation of the Blind of Iowa. We received plaques and awards from that and I guess I also got one from the Iowa Department for the Blind last October for my many years of service with the Business Enterprise Program. I also served on...when I talked about the...where I live in the Plaza Condominiums. I served on the board of directors of the Plaza Condominiums for two, three-year terms. That's where business ability really was needed. We had some problems when that building first opened with some things in the building weren't done right and we had to go and look at where different condominiums were having rain leakage into the building, and we found out that some of the window drains, when they had been installed, were installed backwards and instead of draining out, they were draining into the building. That caused a real problem. So, during one of those sessions my wife and I...she went along to kind of describe what the condo looked like, or so forth and then we went clear up to the 25th floor and we walked around the outside of that building. I kept

telling her not to look down, because she was scared and because the wind was blowing hard, but we walked clear around that building, checking the roofing and the walls to see if there was any possible leakage from the roof that was coming into those walls that might be causing part of the problem.

Now, also during that time we remodeled the Plaza Condominium hallways and elevator areas, and so forth, and that cost us about \$450,000 between that and the fixing of the windows and the areas in the building that were leaky. Then, we had to put in a new air conditioning system and that was over \$500,000, so we had spent over a million dollars by the time we were done. And, of course, the Plaza being fairly new...I think it was about six-years-old then, did not have a reserve built up to handle those kind of problems. And, we had to access the owners of the different condominiums and, of course, people are...when it comes to money, they are pretty cautious and want to be very careful where they have their money spent. We got through that fine and, of course, I was reelected to the board, along with several others of the directors. So, I guess we must have did a good job and we then set up condominium dues that pay for the heat and air conditioning and upkeep of the building itself. We added in a area where we had a reserve fund that's built up to take care of those kind of problems and that's part of the excess...or the value...the condominium dues that are paid each month and we built that up, now to where we were able to fix the elevators and so forth.

After 20 years, your elevators start to get a little old. That was going to cost a little over \$300,000, but we had the money in reserve to do that. That's the good part about

business and being able to use your common sense and business ability to help in those areas. I think that was a good example to the rest of the people...lived in the Plaza Condominiums, that they felt enough confidence in a blind guy to re-elect him to the board for a second term. Several of them asked me to stay on, but six years I was getting into other things with the National Federation of the Blind and I didn't think that I could spare the time to do both. So, I didn't run after that.

The other thing I guess, that I would add is that I pointed out in here earlier about how important it is, or was why I was so interested in trying to make sure that the Blind Commission worked hard to get blind people when they start to lose their sight or even if they've lost it for a while, to come in and take training and, of course, I want to emphasize that, again. But, I also want to thank Dr. Jernigan and the National Federation of the Blind for having brought that kind of a program to Iowa. That was Dr. tenBroek, who was President of the National Federation of the Blind at that time, sent Dr. Jernigan to Iowa when he found that there was an opening for a director to use the state of Iowa as an example of what blind people can do, if they're given the proper training and learn the use of alternative techniques. I think Dr. Jernigan did a fine example of that. It's probably the best state Commission for the Blind in the country. It even received an award for that from President Johnson in the 80s, I believe, Johnson, or 60s...late 60s when Johnson was president. So, even the nation recognized that we had the best library for the blind in the country, probably the biggest also. That alone is worth a lot to blind people, that they now have the ability to

read books and get magazines and so forth that they didn't have before.

Now, with computers we're getting to where you can get books, and so forth, through the computer. For years, we had nothing but libraries for the blind and the Commission for the Blind's library was just an example to all the Commissions for the Blind around the country as to what could be done with a good library for the blind and the amount of books we had and the different books that...I have seven or eight books at a time at home all the time, so I always have a book to read. So, I guess I'm thankful for that and for the fact that Dr. Jernigan had the far sight to see what could be done and got it done...and to thank the legislators and the governors in the state of Iowa for their understanding of what blind people needed and their willingness to help the program and to continue to finance it over the years. But, that doesn't mean that that's going to continue in the future. As money gets tighter and tighter and they keep talking about cutting out this program or that program, I'm sure there may be times again when the Commission will be having to watch to see that its finances are not cut to the point that it cannot do the job that needs to be done. So, all the blind people in the state need to be involved in what the Commission for the Blind does and doesn't do, and see that these kind of programs that we've had are continued.

Hicklin: Well, Joe, you're certainly living proof of the fact that the philosophy that Dr. Jernigan promoted and started with the Department certainly works. You've made a success out of many decades of work and have done very, very well for yourself.

Van Lent: Well, thank you.

Hicklin: And, the...you know, I would certainly agree on keeping the Department viable with funding cuts is something that should be a concern of all consumers and as it will take a lot of consumer input to keep the Department the model that it has been for decades. And, you know, that's the key. The consumers have the input with the legislators and need to stay active and, you know, tell them what's right and what's wrong and help us grow and help the Department get better. Is there anything else you'd...?

Van Lent: No, I think we've pretty well covered this. I think we got a couple hours here. (Laughter)

Hicklin: Again, thank you very much, Joe.

20:24

(End of Recording 4)

Bev Tietz

1/20/2011